

Edited Interview with Jim Bowe in Mount Merrion Ave (30/4/2008)

Máirtín Mac Con Iomaire (MM) Jim Bowe (JB)

1. **MM:** Where and when were you born Jim?
2. **JB:** I was born on the North Strand in Dublin on the 31st January 1942.
3. **MM:** How many was in the family?
4. **JB:** I have one brother and one sister and I come in the middle.
5. **MM:** Did you move from the North Strand out to Clontarf?
6. **JB:** Yes, they were demolishing the houses, they were railway cottages as they call them and we got a house in Clontarf out in Conquer Hill Road behind the bus garage.
7. **MM:** What did your father do?
8. **JB:** My father was a shunter in the railway, which was kind of a dangerous job. There were a lot of his colleagues killed. You have two wagons with fifty or a hundred tons each in them and you have to uncouple one and you have to push them so as they come together and the buffers have to hit and they spring back and at the right time you have to hook off the chain and this was one hell of a dangerous job.
9. **MM:** Did your mother work at all, apart from being a mother?
10. **JB:** No, my mother was a great cook, and you had to be a good cook in those days. I'm not sure if you are familiar with the history of the early 40s, but things were really bad. There were queues in St. Agnes's, North William Street, across the road, people queuing for the stew kitchen. They had these gallon cans and if there were four in the family you got four ladles of stew. But my father going all over the country (on the trains), he used to have one of those wicker baskets with the rails on it to hold his lamp and his stuff in there, but he'd bring home a rabbit, a chicken, a turnip, things that you couldn't get in Dublin at that time for love nor money. And my mother would make a pot of stew, and from an early age we were accustomed to all kinds of food. People used to say 'I wouldn't eat tripe', we got tripe one day a week, 'I wouldn't eat rabbit', we used to stuff the rabbit, boil the rabbit, we'd have cups of soup with bread in it, it was a real kind of farmhouse cookery except it was in Dublin (laugh), a pot with a chicken in it with onions and carrots floating around in it, and more than likely it was boiling fowl, a hen that had given up the ghost. It was unbelievable, full of flavour; I remember getting a mug of the broth with bread in it, absolutely fabulous food. I remember kids in our class who had rickets and scurvy. People would say 'rickets and scurvy, they had that on Mutiny on the Bounty', no, they had it in schools in Ireland and what was it but malnutrition.
11. **MM:** Where did you do your primary schooling?
12. **JB:** We went first of all to St. Agatha's, North William Street, but then we went to Belgrove when we went to Clontarf. Belgrove was a fairly famous school. From Belgrove I went to the Tech in Killester, and every year, every couple of months there would be these scholarships for the ESB, or this or that, a mechanic or a printer, but once one came and I brought home the brochure that there were interviews in Cathal Brugha Street. So my mother scrubbed me up and I went for the interview in Cathal Brugha Street and Miss Boucher-Hayes was there, Miss Murnaghan, Miss Armstrong, Aodhán Ó Muineachán and all those people, and I remember saying that I was in the scouts and I loved cooking. Of course when I was in the scouts, that was my detail, put Jim Bowe

in the kitchen. So it kind of started from that, my love of food, there wasn't that much food around at the time but my mother was very good at making the best of it. My father also had a plot in St. Anne's and we were having turnips and parsnips and radishes and beetroot when nobody knew what they were because he was a country man, he was from Kilkenny, and he had this plot of vegetables. I remember actually my first banana, because remember there were no bananas or oranges between 1942 and 1947 or 1948. There was a banana boat came into the North Wall and they were on the train and a fellow threw my father down a bunch of bananas. He brought them home and we didn't know what to do with them. I was trying to eat it when someone said; no I think you take the skin off it (laugh). If you say that to somebody today, they'd say 'was he born in the Dark Ages?' No, there wasn't, and oranges were exactly the same. All of a sudden we had to become accustomed to oranges and bananas but they weren't going to sail boats from North Africa with the U-Boats in the water. When you say that to a younger person they'd say 'that must be a hundred years ago', but it's not, it's within peoples' lifetimes.

13. **MM:** What age were you when you went for that scholarship?
14. **JB:** I was 15 / 16; my first two years in the college were 1957-1959.
15. **MM:** Who was teaching in the college at this stage?
16. **JB:** You had PJ Dunne, Michael Ganly, Kitty Doyle, Miss Connolly, Paula Daly, Aindreas Ó Muineacháin, Miss Armstrong, Miss Boucher-Hayes, Miss Murnaghan, all of those were there. There wouldn't have been the structures there that came later, as a student these people are who were there.
17. **MM:** Were Beaucaire Murphy or Johnny Annler gone by this stage?
18. **JB:** Yes, they were both, there were no foreign lecturers, and both PJ Dunne and Michael Ganly got their positions when they left. They were the two replacements.
19. **MM:** And both PJ and Michael had worked in Jammet's restaurant. Did Miss Armstrong teach practical classes as well?
20. **JB:** Oh, yes, she did and Miss Murnaghan as well, and Paula Daly who was there as well. She later did the cooking programmes for Stork margarine or Odlums flour. She was very talented; she went to work for Odlums later in Drogheda and was a huge success. At that time there were only one hundred and fifty students in the college, so if we are looking for structures, they weren't there. Room 13 was the common room and we had a radio and we all met and listened to the radio, Fergus Gantly was one of the students there. Now, remember Fergus Gantly wore shop coats, I think the institutional management wore a blue shop coat, the other one wore a khaki shop coat, which was very funny and the cooks wore a white coat, it was very, very small.
21. **MM:** How many were in your class, and do you remember any of their names?
22. **JB:** There would have been twelve in my class, twelve in first year and twelve in second years. I remember in my class there was a fellow called Phelim McGuinness, and Norton, and a neighbour of mine, a fellow called Tony O' Shea, actually they will come into the story later on. Myles Flood's brother was there also, and in the second years was Ciarán Feeley who worked for Irish Base Metals in Clontarf later on, he worked in the Intercontinental and had a beard, a nice kind of a guy. I think Myles Flood was in second year at the time, and I think the year before that was Dave Edwards. I think Andy (Whelan) was in the same year as Dave.
23. **MM:** What do you remember of it, you did practical subjects and then French, maths, English and that?

24. **JB:** Mostly, we had Aindreas Ó Muineachán who tried to put manners on us, Aindreas had us for like maths / English / manners / everything, are you with me? He was the number one guy. Then you had a few of the women for theory of catering, and all of this. The book they used was *All in the Cooking*, that Armstrong and Mumaghan wrote, and it was a very simple but a quite a good book. (note: the main author was Josephine Marnell)
25. I remember then in second year, where the library is now, the room next to the library was the restaurant kitchen. I remember Mick Ganly doing liver and bacon to order with us and sautéed potatoes and that was up-market cuisine compared to what we were doing in first year. You had PJ Dunne for the larder, and the larder was just where the corridor around the corner from the stores is, there was no back stairs, the college stopped there. We used to batten out the veal escallops, it was purely butchery, there were no pates or terrines or that, but I remember the things we did. We made the stockpots, two big ones, skimming the stockpots and roasting the bones, all of that was very important, and every class got buckets of fresh stock which was absolutely great. I remember on a Friday, you had to clean out the stockpots, strain them off, cool them down and refrigerate them. When you came in on Monday, they were jelly, it was really good stuff in that respect. The training was very simple but very good. Paula Daly used to do demonstrations, it was simple stuff. The college has made strides in latter years but I think it was suited to where it was in the 60s, remember we had no peppers back then. Aubergines and courgettes would have been an absolute treat, but they weren't there. The most exotic thing we had was apples, oranges and bananas, they simply weren't there. So any dishes that came with them, was in latter years. So when I finished there I went over to the Metropole.
26. **MM:** Was this after first or second year, where did you spend your first summer?
27. **JB:** No, after second year, I spent my first summer over in Wales with the scouts in a field somewhere in Wales for three weeks. I don't think we has any money, but we were very happy, sleeping in a tent, and if it rained you dug a trench around the tent (laugh). How we didn't all die of pneumonia (laugh), but this is the thing. I came back on the September and went through the year and got my placement the following May or June. It was a big culture shock going into the Metropole.
28. **MM:** This would have been May / June 1959?
29. **JB:** Yes, and remember it was a big culture shock going into the Metropole. The Metropole was a big catering establishment at the time. Downstairs they had the grill room which was top class for what it was, with fellows doing *chateaubriands* carved at the table, do you know what I mean? Then there was the first floor which had the self service which would do around 200-300 meals, and the second floor which had a Buttery / coffee shop / snackery.
30. **MM:** So the grill room was the fine dining restaurant there at the time, I believe the standard was very high?
31. **JB:** The standard was very high. They actually had a charcoal grill with a bellows, so you had to give it a blow to get the steaks cooked, and send the vegetables down and they'd be heated down there in a pan with butter, obviously there were no microwaves back then, and the likes of chateaubriand would be carved at the table and flamed beautifully, it was a very good standard. And also, we had a ballroom, the biggest ballroom in Dublin at the time, it could hold a thousand people. And at the time there was the Vauxhall ball which was black tie, and I remember that once you were 16 or 17 and the chef knew, you could work after 10pm. I remember him telling me 'you are on tonight, aren't you 16?', so obviously my mother had no phone and I couldn't contact her, even the neighbours didn't have phones, so I borrowed a bike from a fellow and I had to give him my bus fare home. So I cycled home and I was stopped on the Clontarf road by a guard for having no light on my bike (laugh) at one o' clock in the morning, probably the only traffic on the Clontarf road at the time. I had to be back the next morning at about 9am.

32. **MM:** What is your first memory when you went in to the Metrople, you had Marley as chef, wasn't it?



Figure JB.1: Joe Erraught, Andy Whelan, Jim Bowe and Anne Treacy

33. **JB:** Michael Marley was the head chef, and Matt Byrne was the second chef. We all know Michael Marley, he was the most cantankerous man, but by god did he run a good kitchen, Matt Byrne was an outstanding chef. Davy Edwards was in the pastry, there was a fellow called Charlie Biddell on the roast and Charlie was eighty years of age and Charlie served on a submarine during the First World War.
34. **MM:** Where was Charlie from?
35. **JB:** He was from Wales, and actually many moons after, I met this young lady after at some sort of social occasion by the name of Biddell. I asked her was she anything to Charlie Biddell and she said he was her grandfather. Of course he was dead many years by then, he lived in Clontarf, but to think that he was the roast cook there at the age of eighty, a lovely guy, you know.
36. **MM:** Funny you say that because Matt Byrne stayed on working in Roly's until he was well into his seventies, he used to do the prep. I worked with him in Blakes in the early 1990s and he used to do the soups, he was brilliant, he'd come in the morning and do all the soups and finish early and go home to look after the wife.
37. **JB:** Matt wore his apron long; he had the moustache and the bald head. Matt was a lovely man, a real gentleman.
38. **MM:** How many would have been in the kitchen in the Metrople back then?
39. **JB:** I'd say 25-30 at the time, and the great thing about the Metrople was that it closed on a Sunday, so we got one and half days off a week. I think we had one early evening; you were on till 6pm. Remember we were off between 3-6pm, it's a long day from 9am till 10pm. We got passes for the pictures because Ranks owned the Metrople, and we went to the pictures every afternoon. I remember going to the pictures, all you'd get in the pictures in the afternoon was hotel workers. I remember one fellow jumping up in the middle of the pictures, saying 'Jesus, I forgot the chickens in the oven', and he just tore off (laugh). Of course we played football; I played in the cinema league and in the hotel league. We played football for about two hours in the afternoon, say twice a week, and then go back and work till 10pm, it was unbelievable.

40. **MM:** When you went in there to the Metropole, was it French classical system of cooking you were learning, with the stocks and *mis en place*, the Escoffier system of the different corners and that?
41. **JB:** Absolutely, you see Matt Byrne would have been trained in the Hibernian. He was with Pierre Rolland and Roger Noblet. Matt would have been very much a traditional French trained cook.
42. **MM:** Where did Michael Marley train or work, he was originally from Belfast but had worked in England, hadn't he?
43. **JB:** He worked for the Grand Central Hotels, they are not there anymore. I'll tell you something, Michael Marley was a master of his craft. They didn't come much better than him. Talk about he way he ran his kitchen, and his profits and that, but the Rank organisation weren't good to work for. He ran the most profitable organisation for them. I remember when I used to jump off the bus and he had a blue Ford Prefect and I still remember the registration number 'WII 120', and if it was there you had to look at your watch and rush to get into the kitchen. I'll tell you something, to remember WII 120 after fifty years (laugh), you put on a spurt and you rushed up to change because if you were a minute late, because his office looked right down the kitchen.
44. **MM:** The kitchen was upstairs, wasn't it?
45. **JB:** Yes the kitchen was on the roof, but it's amazing, the day I left the Metropole I was delighted to see the end of that man, but guess what, I worked in three jobs in which he was my boss after that. I'll skip a whole load of things but I became head chef in the Silver Springs and he was the catering controller, I left Silver Springs and I went to work in CERT and guess who my boss was in CERT, it was Michael Marley.
46. **MM:** We'll just take it from there first. How long did you stay in the Metropole?
47. **JB:** Just twelve months, and from there I went to the Wicklow (Hotel).
48. **MM:** Who was in the Wicklow, because it was a fairly good restaurant at that time?
49. **JB:** The Wicklow was regarded as one of the best hotels in Dublin. Tommy Markey was the head chef, he was from Dublin. Lord and Lady Brocket owned it at the time, this would be Carton House people. It was regarded as one of the best steak houses, grill houses, roast houses, you know this kind of stuff. We made big pots of brown Windsor soup which you don't see today, again, I remember making the brown Windsor soup, pure roasted beef bones. Brown Windsor is thin demi-glaze with sherry in it, are you with me? Just beef soup, it was hearty food, no waste.
50. **MM:** Would there have been many in that kitchen. Do you remember any of the names?
51. **JB:** It was very small, about eight people. Tommy Markey was head chef and the *sous chef* was Frankie Plummer. There was Tommy de Lacy, I remember one of the lads played in goals for Sligo, and whenever he had a match I'd work for him on Sunday and get ten shillings for it (laugh). His name will come to me in a moment. It was a very happy place, a very happy place. I stayed in the Wicklow for a year. The manageress, Miss McCrossen, then asked me if I would be interested in going to Switzerland, she wrote the letters of recommendation for me and sent them off to the *Banhof Buffet* in Zurich.
52. **MM:** This would be the restaurant at the railway station in Zurich?
53. **JB:** Yes and at that time, it was the biggest restaurant in Europe, and guess how many is working in it today? Four. I flew over, aged nineteen. We had a kitchen with a hundred and fifty cooks in it, it was unbelievable. What a culture shock, we started work at 6.30am and you got your

lunch at 10am. You worked till 2pm and you'd be off from 2-5pm and then work till 9pm. You would get one day off a week and every sixth Sunday, Monday this week, Tuesday next week and so on until you got Saturday and Sunday off together and you thought you were in heaven (laugh). We were down stairs in the butchery with whole hens and you'd take off the feet and give them a manicure and put them and the chicken necks in for the stock. We cut off the cockscomb and that and you know the little piece of meat at the craw, we kept that for paté. Basically there was nothing wasted, it was unbelievable.

54. **MM:** Who was working there at the time? Were they from all over the world?
55. **JB:** Yes, all over the world. Most of the cooks were Swiss or Swiss – German, the Swiss ones could have been from the French speaking part. Remember everyone spoke three languages. When I went back there last September all the signs in the shops were in English, you might as well be in a high street in London. Then no-one spoke English. I remember meeting an old man and telling him I was from Ireland and he knew Greenland, and Iceland and Scotland but never heard of Ireland.
56. **MM:** Did you pick up German fairly quick?
57. **JB:** German was the thing, it was a kind of dialect of German. It came after about six weeks, because you had no other options. One or two of the other young Swiss lads spoke English. I remember one lad, Freddie Rossi was his name and the head chef used to say 'Freddie, come here, tell him to do this or that' Freddie would translate, but it was very strict. I remember we would collect our wages once a month, which was about five pounds a week, they might give you three hundred Swiss francs at one table and take fifty back at another table and then maybe if you broke the bed or a pane of glass they would take it off you, and if you came out with fifty in the end you would be lucky (laugh).
58. **MM:** Where were you staying?
59. **JB:** Oh, there was a staff house; this is where I came across Joe Hegarty. Joe Hegarty had to do his two or three months from the Shannon students (Shannon School of Hotel Management), and he was on the veg. The pots were so big, you had to put them up dry and there was this big tap and I used to call Joe over and I'd have the tap dripping and I'd swing the tap over and the water would hit the range and a big cloud of steam, and I thought this was very funny, trying to roast Joe Hegarty (laugh). Needless to say I got a few thumps for it.
60. It was grand, but Jimmy Rock told me that the law changed afterwards, because he was a few years behind me and he worked across the road in the *Movenpick* and he said that although he worked hard, when he came back to Ireland he had a thousand pounds in his bank balance, which was unheard of. You'd never save that much money in Ireland. So we were denied that because we were in training. I remember working as a *potager* and you had to do sixteen big butchers trays called 'meskerplex', four of those of pasta, four of those of *spätzle*, four of those of rice and four of those of you know, before you started, and there was big vats of soup. The soups were calves feet boiled and skimmed and strained, they used to do very Germanic type of cooking, you'd break an egg into a bowl and pour the broth into it, we used to call it '*bouillon mit eir*'. I'll tell you one thing, I never worked as hard in my life, the attitude towards work was unbelievable, even he fellows you worked with, you know, would say 'no, we cannot talk about tonight or what we will do because now we must work'. It was a kind of a culture shock, but I stayed there for about fourteen months and then I went home and got a job in Dublin Airport on the sauce corner with Jimmy Kilbride.
61. **MM:** At this time you were probably out of your time (finished the apprenticeship)?
62. **JB:** They had this category that was called an improver chef. I was on the sauce corner with Jimmy Kilbride and one or two days I did the flambé in the restaurant.

63. **MM:** Who was out there with Jimmy at this time, was Jimmy Flahive the head chef?
64. **JB:** Flahive was the head chef, Bill Ryan was over in the flight kitchens, Micky Mullen's son Michael Junior was chef there at the time, I don't know what happened to him, he had a sister out in Argentina and he may have gone out to her. He was the greatest mimic ever; he would walk up behind you and mimic Jimmy Flahive. I'd have great fun with him. Johnny Opperman was the boss, and I remember when they opened up the Green Lounge and I was brought over to do the Green Lounge and on a Sunday all the people used to come out to see the airplanes and the Green Lounge was packed, and I was flipping hamburgers and chips, which was new, and scampi and chips.
65. I remember working with Brendan O'Carroll, the comedian, and I'm trying to figure out was it in the airport or maybe it was in the Intercontinental. People used to ask me if I ever saw him in the Olympia, but I'd say that I listened to it from 9am till 12am (laugh), I worked with him for donkeys years.
66. **MM:** He was a waiter, I think in the Shelbourne before going into comedy full time, but how long did you stay in the airport?
67. **JB:** Again just about a year, and come September they were getting rid of people and things got very quiet and I remember serving a portion of French fried onions and they were stuck together so I got a week's notice. The union went bananas, because this seemingly was what they did every year. It was nothing to do with the onions.
68. **MM:** What influence did Jimmy Kilbride have on you there?
69. **JB:** Jimmy was one of the finest cooks I have ever met in my whole life, and I think that is saying an awful lot. I think I got to know Jimmy better than most people because we became great buddies, great drinking buddies. Jimmy taught at every level, he introduced the City & Guilds 706/3 into the college. He was a total master at the content of the 706/3, and then he went on teach pastry at the highest level, it would be 706/3/4. We were doing things like Bombes Glacé and Sally Lunns and all these stuff that you don't see today, but by God, Jimmy was a master of his art, you couldn't say more than that, a fabulous, fabulous cook, and again they wouldn't promote him in the college. Where other people got senior lectureships they wouldn't promote him.
70. **MM:** But out at the airport, I believe he was quite inspirational, getting people motivated and out playing football on their breaks and that?
71. **JB:** Oh, yes, remember Jimmy was a young man at this stage and whatever you did for Jimmy, you did it with one hundred percent. I played football, and then whether you were doing the sauce; I remember being on the sauce corner with Jimmy and I couldn't keep up with him, he was that good. Remember the Collar of Gold which was what they called the restaurant at the time, was the finest restaurant in Dublin. It is hard to believe that today. The title was the Collar of Gold, and it was a big restaurant, it stretched from here to across the road. You would do hundreds of people, remember, you could have three delayed flights and they got a cold meat salad with tea and bread or a fry up, along with the regulars. You could be busy and then you'd get three delayed flights. That type of thing is unheard of today, now they wouldn't even give you a sandwich (laugh). And then on Saturday night there was music and dancing. The restaurant was top class.
72. **MM:** I believe Charlie Haughey was a regular out there, because in many ways there was very little else on the northside of the city at that time?
73. **JB:** Yes, indeed, and I remember one time the fridges breaking down and who was fixing them but the puppet guy from the television, Eugene Lambert, he was the refrigeration engineer re-gassing the fridges.

74. **MM:** So you were in the airport for a year, where did you go next?
75. **JB:** I went to the Hyde Park Hotel in London.
76. **MM:** What brought you to London?
77. **JB:** You see, Tony O'Shea, my neighbour and friend, who I was in Cathal Brugha Street with had a bed-sit in London, are you with me? I said 'sure it would be grand to go to London'. So the first place I went to was actually the St. Ermins Hotel, a bit of a dump, a Victorian Hotel near Caxton Hall. I remember the morning that one of the Beatles was getting married, we had a champagne reception, and they came in and we were doing *hors d'oeuvres*, I was in charge of the *hors d'oeuvres* and I had never done them before in my life but wasn't long learning. I was in charge of putting up three or four trolleys of *hors d'oeuvres* a day, and then do *canapés*. I remember drinking bottles of champagne in the kitchen, your man Teazy Weazy Reynolds who had a hairdressing salon across the road, his horse won the Grand National and he was sending bottles of champagne into the kitchen (laugh). It was a fun time, but it was a bit of a dump. I stayed there six months and then went on to Hyde Park Hotel.
78. Now the Hyde Park was wow. First of all there was three hot plates, all French. The head chef was *Toullamon*, the famous man, the man was eighty years of age and his office was the size of the front room there, and I remember being brought in to meet him; he had three *sous chefs*, all Swiss and French. I thought the funniest thing as being given this enamel mug and told not to lose it. I thought it was a joke, but no delft was allowed around the kitchen; think about it, how often have you seen chefs with pints of milk and that in kitchens, it made perfectly good sense.
79. I went for the grand job of first *commis tournant* at £12 and 10 shillings a week. On Monday I was on the sauce, Tuesday I was on the fish, Wednesday I was on the roast, Thursday I was on the *potager*; let me tell you something, you couldn't buy this experience. It was unreal, I remember I had to be in first, I had to make the *veloutés*, and we had this *bain marie* of fish stock and we poached the fish in it and topped it up, poached the fish and topped it up, but by the end of the night you would drain it off and you'd jump on top of it, it was that gelatinous – jelly. Everything was made to absolute perfection. Everything was done on this beautiful earthenware on silver gondolas, you know. You wouldn't put your hand on the hotplate, it was the old steel hotplate, you'd put the stuff on it and it would stay warm. We did Regimental Dinners, now security at the time was no problem, no hassle with security, but I knew guys after who had to be vetted and told to stay out of work.
80. **MM:** You were there pre the Troubles?
81. **JB:** Exactly, but it was absolutely fabulous food, beautiful food. And I remember every corner would put up for the chefs table, and all the chef de parties had their meeting over lunch and all the dishes would go in.
82. **MM:** It was a form of quality control?
83. **JB:** Absolutely, and the old man sat at the top and he was the loveliest man, I had a catering magazine, I must have lost it, *The Caterer*, and he was on the front cover of it when he was eighty five years of age, testing the Christmas pudding. This man was a legend, he was a kind of an inspiration to cooks, he'd walk through the kitchen once a day and tap you on the back and say hello, and he was fabulous. The roast corner was amazing, there were *frittures* on the range, there were no thermostats, the blue smoke indicated to pull it aside, you know. There were two vats of fat on the range, and in the kitchen was the last coal range over on the veg corner, now they didn't use it often, but when they did, your legs would roast off you. In the larder they had, I thought it was a holy water font. They had no *robo-coupés*, this was a big pestle and mortar and they pounded the livers for the *paté*, and then rubbed them through big sieves like you'd see on a

building site. It was that kind of stuff, everything was made kind of perfect. One day a week, I got to do the little grill that was upstairs, which wasn't very busy. I remember carving a rib of beef for Sir Roy Wollensky, the Governor of Canada one day, and going to the other end of the scale, Barbara Windsor, you turn on Eastenders and there she is today, but she gave me ten shillings, do you know what I mean, ten shillings.

84. I remember coming up to Christmas, asking the chef if I could go home for Christmas, and he said ok, so going home on the boat – train type of thing. And on the boat, I met Phelim McGuinness and Ray Norton, and the lads were saying 'you're what? You're working in the Hyde Park Hotel?', now remember that the factories in London were booming at the time. They said 'listen, we are working in a car factory in Lewisham and we're earning twenty pounds a week, give us a ring and we'll get you in'. I remember thinking 'will I or won't I?', I was feeling hard done by with my twelve pounds ten shillings, but I stuck it out, I was glad I did. At the end of the day you could be frying eggs and chips and getting £20 a week in Lewisham, you know it was great money, where I was getting £12, but...
85. **MM:** You wouldn't be moving any further in a place like that, though. How long did you stay in the London?
86. **JB:** Between the two of them, probably a year and a half. A year or so in the Hyde Park which was good, it was excellent.
87. **MM:** Did you come straight back and into the Intercontinental when it opened up in 1963?
88. **JB:** That's exactly what happened, I used to speak to my mother once a week and she told me there were interviews for the Intercontinental Hotel, so I came home and went for it. Now, the Intercontinental certainly was different, first of all, it was no problem, a lot of people around me were struggling, but I'd seen it all before. A fellow called Freddie Goldinger was the head chef and he was a great man, he was a fabulous guy. All the *chefs de parties* were French or Swiss, and I was on the sauce corner with Marcel Pezinini or something, who was French, and poor Marcel hadn't a clue. I was showing Marcel, but that didn't matter, now he was a lovely fellow, a grand fellow. Now Marcel didn't have a clue but it didn't really matter, because Willy Somers little brother was on the sauce with us, who is dead now, but the sauce corner was hard work because we had a lot of functions, a lot of buffets and all that. I stayed there for six or seven years.
89. **MM:** Now the foreign *chef de parties* only stayed for a year or so, did you take over as sauce chef from Marcel?
90. **JB:** No, Bill Kavanagh took over from Marcel, so Bill was the sauce chef. Bill was a lovely man, but we made his life hell, because we were younger and playing tricks on him and that (laugh). Bill was a lovely man, but there was a struggle when they made Bill sauce chef and then *sous chef* because still the head chef and *sous chef* were trying to keep out the Irish fellows. We ate out the back and the chefs ate out front but there were only two chairs, so Bill got another chair and sat out with them, which was the right thing to do. I got on great with Bill; he is one of my best friends today, but it was hard on Bill.
91. **Discussion off tape that a certain individual was very ambitious and the mood in the kitchen changed.**
92. Freddie Goldinger went and the man from Carlton Towers, the French man came, I remember visiting him a few years ago in London in the Carlton Towers before he retired and he was very gracious, he ordered a bottle of champagne and an ounce of caviar up to the chef's office, I can't think of his name now. He was very good, he was very good. But poor old Bill got himself in a spot of bother, he hit a waiter or something and he was let go. There was a lot of disharmony there at this time so I got sort of pissed off with it at this time and there was a job going in the Silver Springs as *sous chef* so I went there and I worked with Günter Oxx.

93. **MM:** So this was around 1969 that you went to the Silver Springs in Cork, but before we move down there, did you see the quality of food drop over your period in the Intercontinental, and what would be the reason for that?
94. **JB:** Yes, very much so, the reasons for it was profits, number one, a change in management affected things, on a Sunday evening, it was the place to go for the Sunday evening buffet, all the Jewish community who know where value is would be there, and the stuff was second to none, and then for whatever reason the whole thing changed. Now, I'm not knocking our own, but when the foreign *chef de parties* left, the management thinking would be 'ok, the honeymoon is over, let's start making money here'. There were a lot of cutbacks.
95. **MM:** So you feel that they made their name and were now resting on their reputation?
96. **JB:** Yes, that was the thinking at the time, there was a lot of that.
97. **MM:** Did you notice that there was a push from the union to get Irish guys into the senior positions in these kitchens?
98. **JB:** There was a lot of that alright, ok, maybe some of them didn't deserve, or didn't have the background needed for promotion. I'd say you have come across that before.
99. **MM:** Yes I have, even in the Gresham, I think McManus was promoted and probably should have never have been promoted; although he was a great cook, he didn't make a good head chef when Uhleman left. Some people were promoted who didn't have the background necessary to bring an establishment forward.
100. **JB:** You said it yourself; the standard went from being very high to being only moderate. The standards dropped.
101. **MM:** So you went down to The Silver Springs in Cork as *sous chef* working with a German head chef called Günter Oxx?
102. **JB:** Günter was one of the loveliest men you'd come across, one of nature's gentlemen, a fabulous guy. Günter fought in the Second World War and he was in combat, and on one of the last days of Berlin he was on the stockades. All his arms and shoulders were ripped and somebody sewed it up with copper wire, it was all they could get. Poor old Günter, his nerves weren't the best, he had a kind of a briefcase and he'd go down to the market pubs early in the morning. He suffered from all kinds of stomach ailments, he was a youngish man, and in the briefcase there was always (wrapped in newspapers) two or three bottles of stout. There were days when he would be in the office and his head would be on the desk, so I'd just pull the office door over and get on with it. 'Where is the chef?', 'He's on the phone, he's busy'. No one ever said 'will you look at your man', he was such a lovely man. Eventually the management copped on, and Günter was stood down for a better word, and they sent someone down from the Metropole to take over for a couple of weeks and then I was made head chef. It was very difficult, because the people you had with you didn't want to work. They didn't want to work, 'what's your problem? What's wrong with the steak?' They just wanted to get it out, whereas I wanted them to do it nice, put a nice garnish with it, again it was very difficult but I survived for a year and a half.
103. **MM:** Was it owned by Ranks at the time?
104. **JB:** It was owned by Ranks and Michael Marley was my boss. It was very enjoyable, a nice time in my life, working away, and of course you had a grill room downstairs, a fabulous little grill room, and a nice restaurant and we did weddings, but it was easy.

- 105.**MM:** There wasn't much in Cork at that time, was there? The Oyster Tavern was there, and Arbutus and Ballymaloe were only really starting?
- 106.**JB:** There was very little, the Oyster Tavern and the Metropole was about it. Norma and I used to go up to Arbutus for lunch on a Sunday but they were only starting off really. You'd get a nice little bit of roast chicken and a few vegetables for twelve and sixpence, you know. Ballymaloe would have been very much in their infancy. But the Oyster Tavern was actually the best of the whole lot, because on their menu you had rump steak, and I always got a rump steak, which meant the meat was hung, beautiful meat, grilled and you'd have a nice jus. The Oyster Tavern was a fabulous place.
- 107.**MM:** How long did you stay down there?
- 108.**JB:** I went to Rockwell in around 1969 / 1970.
- 109.**MM:** How did that come about, had Rockwell been long open or was it just opening?
- 110.**JB:** Rockwell had opened as a catering school a couple of years previous, there was an advertisement in the paper and I went for an interview and got it. It was a little bit rough around the edges at the time, it was run by the priests, you see they had about a thousand students in Rockwell at the time, about 500 juniors and 500 seniors, and they all needed to be fed. There was a big kitchen and over there were the classrooms, and you did your stint in the kitchen and then a stint in the classroom, the roster moved around. Now it was rough, and a lot of criticism was made of it, but I'll tell you something, it got a lot of fellows a start that they wouldn't have normally got. There were a lot of people who graduated through it and made a good living out of it.
- 111.**MM:** What sort of students went there, were they the same type of student who would come into Cathal Brugha Street, or a slightly different student?
- 112.**JB:** Again, it was mixed, you could have got a lot of orphans, Michael Clifford started with me and Michael was a great cook, but Michael came from a foster home. So it was mixed, there would have been a lot of orphans for want of a better word, and there would have been a lot of fairly well heeled people who couldn't get into Cathal Brugha Street at the time, they were only taking ten or twelve people at the time.
- 113.**MM:** So they had a choice of going to Maynooth, Rockwell or Athenry?
- 114.**JB:** That was it exactly. It was mixed. It would be wrong to say that they were underprivileged or anything.
- 115.**MM:** It wasn't like Roebuck? Roebuck was originally set up for people who were either unemployed or out of jail or that and needed training?
- 116.**JB:** No, these were kids who were out of school, and they couldn't get into Cathal Brugha Street, but see there was a couple of people in Killarney, there was one woman, I think she fostered twelve young fellows, and she had a guest house. Now I'm not going into why she fostered them (laugh) but they came to Rockwell and they became excellent waiters and excellent chefs who went off to England and were very successful. I met them donkeys years after that at a reunion and they were all doing exceptionally well for themselves, so that is exactly what I'm saying, it made a good living for a lot of young people that wouldn't have got a chance.
- 117.**MM:** How long did they stay there?
- 118.**JB:** Two years, based on the Cathal Brugha Street model, you had first and second years.
- 119.**MM:** Freddie Thoma was teaching with you there, I believe, who else was there?

- 120.**JB:** Freddie was there, when I went there first, Jim Ahearn was there. Jim is a superb cook, I mean super. Sure look at the job he is doing now in Kelly's Hotel in Rosslare, he is a fine guy, an excellent cook. One of the students who was there when I was there went with Jim to Rosslare, Michael, he finished up in Rockwell and he went with Jim and is now the *sous chef* in Rosslare today, so that tells you a whole lot.
- 121.**MM:** You had Jim Ahearn, and Freddie Thoma, who must have been teaching pastry, probably?
- 122.**JB:** You see, I worked with Freddie in Dromoland, now remember we had June, July and August off in Rockwell and guess what they didn't pay you. So I was head chef in Dromoland for one year and head chef in Ashford Castle another year. You see Ashford and Dromoland opened from Easter till September every year. They didn't want me back in the college until September because they'd have to pay me, so I would go to Dromoland and open it in Easter and close it in September so it was the best of both worlds.
- 123.**MM:** When you were in Rockwell, you were working for CERT? How many more were teaching in it?
- 124.**JB:** You see, they brought me in as the teacher. Jim did the kitchen and was excellent, are you with me, Jim didn't want to know about teaching, excellent cook and that, so I was brought in for that side of things. Again we did service in the main restaurant and then we had class from 2-5pm in the kitchen, whatever the lesson was, so that was my kind of thing.
- 125.**MM:** Did you like that; did you find you had an affinity for teaching?
- 126.**JB:** I absolutely loved it. And guess who my boss was? Michael Marley. I remember Michael Marley came down and introduced me to Practical Professional Cookery, saying this is the new book we will be using; I'll get you a copy and send it on to you. It was wonderful, absolutely wonderful. Again the conditions, we could have done with better equipment and that, but I used to do the pastry with the lads and we'd make the finer things you wouldn't normally see, and anything special would go on the menu for the fathers' supper that evening. And then there were the dinners, and you'd use them as class prep.
- 127.**MM:** Would you be feeding the fathers (priests) or the boys, or both? Was the fathers the fine dining and the students the canteen, so that the trainees experienced both kinds of catering?
- 128.**JB:** Oh, both, exactly, as well as that on six tables in the seniors at night, on rotation, they would get a mixed grill. So one week table one would get it, the second week table two, and so on, while the others got whatever normal food was on the menu, shepherds pie or something. There was always something happening, it could be a little dinner on for the rugby crowd, or soup and sandwiches or that. Now what we did in the other building is that we opened a little restaurant where people came in, there was big community of teachers and that, we could do fifty lunches. This was an extra little bit of training, so say 'Johnny, you are on the main courses, you are on the veg, etc.', and we'd call out the orders 'one soup, one Florida cocktail, one roast beef etc.', it was something extra, all part of the progress.
- 129.**MM:** I'm thinking that it must have been opened a few years before you were there because Eugene McSweeney trained there.
- 130.**JB:** Eugene was there a year or two before I was there and Eugene was in the Cashel Palace because I remember meeting Eugene there.
- 131.**MM:** How long did you stay in Rockwell? Were you married at this stage?

132.**JB:** Around eight years, so that brought me up until 1978 or so. Yes I was married, I met Norma in the Intercontinental and we had a little cottage in Rockwell, Ruth was born while we were there.

133.**MM:** Did you go from there to Cathal Brugha Street?

134.**JB:** No, what I did was, we went to go back to the city to buy a house and set up, and I met Joe Hegarty somewhere and told him I was coming back to the city, and he gave me part-time hours in the college. But I came back and I worked for six months in Leopardstown Racecourse, I was head chef there, and another six months in the Rochestown Lodge. While doing part time in the college, three jobs came up; Andy (Whelan) got one, Joe Erraught got one, and I got the other. And that would bring us up to 1979 /1980. Jury's took over the franchise for Leopardstown Racecourse and actually made money at it, but for some unknown reason decided not to continue with the franchise, they actually made a lot of money, so it didn't make sense. Fellows like John Linnane were supplying me with gateaux from Jury's and some of the lads would come out and work at meetings, and we did some big functions there as well. One of the big orchestras came and we did a buffet for a thousand people. So I moved into a house on a Wednesday and was made redundant on a Friday, it was one of those nightmares, so that is how I got the job in the Rochestown Lodge. I called up, someone said they were looking for chef, so I went up, a nice little place but again you could be banging your head off the wall (there was no passion for food among the staff).

135.**MM:** Going back to Michael Clifford, did you clearly see that he had talent straight away?

136.**JB:** The first kitchen Michael Clifford worked in was Ashford Castle and I brought him with me, and I hand-picked him, for very obvious reasons, because he had a flair. Even giving out sausages and mash, he could do it a bit different, it is amazing. So Michael came the Easter we were there. I'll tell you the story of Ashford, the Huggard family had just sold it that year to a fellow called Jack Mulcahy, who was an American multi-millionaire steel magnate. The Huggards were the staff in the castle, and Chris Andrews, who was a brother of David Andrews, had a hotel in Limerick. He recruited me to be head chef in Ashford, he was a very clever man, we set it up, started at Easter and closed it down in September. That September we did a wedding for the guy who was manager for decades after that, I forget his name. Chris was the advisor, because Chris was married to Jack Mulcahy's niece, so Chris recruited me to set up the kitchen and after the first season he said in September 'this is perfect, we're closing now, you go back to Rockwell, I'll be in touch with you and we'll set up a contract, we'll build you a house, this is big stuff'. He was killed in a car crash coming from the funerals or Bloody Sunday, that man was a maniac in a car, he aquaplaned somewhere on the Naas Road, and was killed outright, and I had a verbal contract with him. Peter Huggard was then the manager and I didn't actually see eye to eye with Peter, so that was that, I was never going back. So, the summer after, I went down The Devon Inn in Templeglantine, on the border between Limerick and Kerry, and we did thirty six weddings in twenty nine days, with hundreds *à la carte*, but again it paid the bills. I was so near to the big time, but then it didn't happen, the man was killed. Isn't fate an amazing thing?

137.**MM:** Indeed it is, and it is all about personalities, meeting somebody you get on with, and often you stay working with that person.

138.**JB:** I was always lucky with regards the summers, you had June, July and August and they had you for extra because Rockwell didn't pay you. I spent two summers in Dromoland working for another eccentric millionaire, and you could use anything you wanted, Ashford was the same, use anything you want, but every summer was different. I went up to work for Mrs. Britton up in Rossanowlagh for two summers, and she gave us a mobile home on the beach, so the girls had a month on the beach in Rossanowlagh, most kids would kill for it. There were no foreign holidays at the time, but I still had to put in the work. Rossanowlagh was fantastic, you had a hundred and twenty dinners every night, you had fifty or sixty high teas, and you had students in the kitchen

from Killybegs or the Northern Ireland colleges. I must say lovely kids, and a wonderful set-up, but hard work. I worked for her for two summers.

139.MM: How about the City & Guilds 706/3, did you do that before or after you were made full time in the college?

140.JB: I went in year one, and the 706/3 had just finished the year previous and Jimmy (Kilbride) was saying that 'if we get the numbers, we'll do it again', so I was told to do it by Joe Hegarty, so that was my introduction to the 706/3.

141.MM: So you were in the second or third year of it being run?

142.JB: I would say the second, yeah, in 1980. Again it was a wonderful course, Willy Somers was in my class, and Paddy Brady, I can't remember some of the others because I never saw them again.

143.MM: Was Noel Cullen in your class?

144.JB: No, Noel, and Eugene McSweeney, and Joe Erraught were in the year before me, and Andy (Whelan) was two years after me.

145.MM: How was it, was there anything new in it, or was it just going over stuff you had covered in England and along the way?

146.JB: The point about it, and I'm not just blowing my own trumpet, I was light years ahead of most of them for the reasons I have already given.

147.MM: Well, I spoke to Jimmy Kilbride, and he said that the two star pupils he had on the 706/3 over the years were yourself and Noel Cullen. He said you were absolutely gifted with your hands.

148.JB: Well, I didn't want to say that myself (laugh), it's good to crosscheck (laugh), but it was a wonderful course, really wonderful, and I went on to do the pastry with Jimmy and he was equally as gifted at pastry. Things like *croutes*, like savoury *croutes*, we used to make these Sally Lunn's, and carve them and toast them, serve things on top of them. I don't think I ever met a man who was as well read as Jimmy, you know. He was tremendous to that particular respect; he had everything on his fingertips, ice cream gateaux and bombes. He'd blow them out, things you wouldn't be allowed to do today.

149.MM: Did he instil a passion for reading in you?

150.JB: Absolutely, that is where I got it from, I came into the Oriental cookery, I'd get a book, and then one of the summers I went to New York and I was working for Marriott in the flight kitchen in Kennedy Airport. Air India was on one side of me and Air Taiwan or Air China was on the other. South African Airways was there, Air France was there, and I'd be looking around, I'd watch the guys doing a hundred weight of rice in a tilting braising pan with the stock and turning it on barely and off again, then putting a cross of yellow colouring on it and the lid down, and that was saffron rice (laugh). And I remember reading up about all of this, and when I came home I remember getting a phone call one day, an Oriental voice saying 'Mr.Bowe, we believe you are an expert in Oriental Cookery'. I thought it was one of the lads winding me up, so I said 'give me your phone number and I'll call you back', which I did, and it was one of the Japanese car companies, they were launching the Nissan Bluebird car. Well there was a big poster of Mount Fuji there and we did all *Teriyaki*, and *Sukiyaki*, and we had an audience of a hundred and fifty people. Tony Campbell was on the *Sukiyaki* and we cooked up a storm and served on the bonnet of the Bluebird, and fed about a hundred people (laugh), we probably got a hundred quid each (laugh). I knew nothing about Japanese cookery but it took me about a fortnight to find out, you know.

151. Noel Cullen came to me and said 'we are doing a Conquer Cancer thing in the Royal Marine Hotel, will you do a Chinese cookery demonstration?' Well nobody was doing Chinese cookery at the time, so Michael Martin was my *commis* at the time, and I said 'come on, let's get set up', so we had our woks and our pans and our bit of history and that and then Michael Martin said 'chef, look, the game is up', and I said 'what do you mean the game is up?' I lifted my head and there was the Chinese delegation from the Chinese Embassy walking down the aisle, and I was giving a history of each dish and rice and paddy fields and they were absolutely thrilled. They didn't think any Irish people knew the history of Chinese food. So I was invited to a dinner in the Chinese Embassy and it was incredible to be entertained in the Chinese Embassy. Now I think there were duck feet in broth and Norma nearly threw up, because you see western duck feet are like crackling, no problem, Chinese duck feet are boiled or poached, it was like a big bit of bubble gum. The food was great and washed down with Chrysanthemum wine etc. I didn't notice too much, but Norma said that they had no central heating on (laugh), I don't think they were too interested, you just left your coat on (laugh), but that was a fun thing.
152. **MM:** Just going back to Cathal Brugha Street, there were not that many of you teaching there at first. There was yourself, Jimmy Kilbride, Joe Erraught, PJ Dunne, Michael Ganly, Andy Whelan, and that was it. Were you teaching the chefs programme?
153. **JB:** You see we were brought in for what was really the start of the day release programme; that was the reason that we were brought in. Michael and Jimmy and PJ could handle the chef's programme, but the day release programme had just begun. We obviously had other classes but we were brought specifically in for the day release.
154. **MM:** I know you would have had Alan O'Reilly as a day release, was Michael Martin full-time?
155. **JB:** Yes Alan was in my class, and Michael was full-time. Michael was so talented, three or four gold medals in Hotelympia. Michael went off to London to work with the Greek guy, Nico Ladenis, a guy who has never got the praise he deserves. I regard Nico as one of the best. Paul Flynn worked with Nico.
156. **MM:** Paul Flynn actually cooked one of Elizabeth David's last meals, which was a consommé that Nico brought into her in a flask in hospital, because Nico was a great friend of hers when she was dying.
157. **JB:** I had a copy of Nico's book which is more a life story than a cookbook; I think it is called *My Gastronomy*.
158. **MM:** Did you eat out much in Ireland or Dublin when you came back from London? Did you ever eat out in Jammet's or the Russell or that?
159. **JB:** No, we couldn't afford it at the time.
160. **MM:** How about later on, with restaurants like Snaffles or the Golden Orient, or the Soup Bowl?
161. **JB:** Well, I would have gone to eat in the Oriental ones, but it was very dear compared to the money you were earning; it was a big deal, a big treat to get out to one.
162. **MM:** So you only went out if it was an occasion? I suppose you were eating the food for free at work anyway?
163. **JB:** Absolutely, you see Ireland was at a transition stage, it was only coming into a better style of cuisine. Now I don't know what you know about Jammet's, but Jammet's wouldn't have

been terribly, what would I say, 'gourmet food'. Jammet's had one thing, it was a French restaurant and it cooked to order, and they would serve a nice dish under a dome (*cloche*) with a nice waiter, I think that was more of its benefit rather than this wonderful cuisine. Now, don't get me wrong, there was nothing wrong with the food.

164.MM: I think that Jammet's in a way was in a bit of a time warp. Jammet's was serving Edwardian style food for sixty seven years, and it didn't really change. I think that when the Russell opened, it was producing much more exciting food and stole the top position in Dublin from Jammet's.

165.JB: Exactly, that's how it was, because I used to go into Jammet's kitchen, waiting for one of the lads to come play football or something, and there would be a few orders going out, the chef had gone, there was liver and bacon with some *jus* and *beurre noisette* over it, but it wasn't like Derry Clarke or that, it was very much Elizabeth David type of food.

166.MM: It was perfectly prepared French Classical cooking, not *Nouvelle cuisine*?

167.JB: Exactly, in fact a lot of people if they saw it today wouldn't go near it. So they'd roast a chicken and carve it at your table, are you with me?

168.MM: Interestingly enough, we seem to be going back to that. A lot of people are doing these Rotisseries in their restaurants because people are going back to the flavour of food.

169.JB: Well that is no harm at all.

170.MM: So, with the day release programme kicking off in Cathal Brugha Street, it shows that at least more chefs are being trained. Where were they coming to you from, Hotels, Restaurants?

171.JB: Yes, Pat Zaidan was one of them. Pat was in Celtic Mews at the time.

172.MM: That's right, and then Guilbaud's opened around 1981. When is the first time you took note of Guilbaud's?

173.JB: Well first of all, when it opened first there was write ups in the paper about it, the cost of the food and that, and you become very much aware that it was the first in Dublin, something new or something different.

174.MM: Would you be aware at the time of the *Coq Hardi* and John Howard?

175.JB: Well I worked in the *Coq Hardi*, first of all, when I was in Rockwell he'd phone me. He was head chef in White's in Wexford at the time, and he'd say 'Jim, are you doing anything this weekend? Come on down.' What I saw there, I hadn't seen anywhere else in Dublin or anywhere because John was a French trained classical cook, and is superb. He had some party in for the weekend, and we'd cook away for the weekend, have a few pints at night, get paid on a Sunday and drive back to Rockwell with a few bob in my pocket. When I came back to Dublin, I met him someplace and he said he was thinking of opening up a place. It was the old Pirate's Den I worked in. Where John's restaurant was, well, next door was the old Lansdowne Bar. That was the old Pirate's Den. John was in at the back of the bar, he had a curtain (separating them) and he had six or eight tables. That's where John started and I worked in there with John. John would give me the list of what is on tonight, I'd do the French onion soup with the croutons, and have everything ready, and he'd say 'oh I have a private party upstairs', he wouldn't tell me who it was (laugh), but I found out later (Haughey), but I had everything ready for him. I'd get a tenner, John was a great friend of mine.

176.MM: Didn't you do a bit in the Guinea Pig as well with Mervyn Stewart?

- 177.**JB:** I opened up the Guinea Pig for Mervyn (laugh). I was just in the college or that, I had just come back to Dublin, I knew Mervyn from the 706/3 class, and I worked with him for a year or two, around 1978. When I went to the Guinea Pig first, it was certainly different, but Mervyn did a good job there.
- 178.**MM:** At that time, from the late 70s, early 80s was really the birth of these chef / proprietors. I know the King Sitric had been open for quite a while, but you had the *Coq Hardi*, the Guinea Pig, the *Mirabeau*, did you know Sean Kinsella?
- 179.**JB:** I know Sean very well. I know Sean going back donkeys' years, because Sean would be around the same vintage as myself. I hadn't seen Sean for donkeys' years. I won a number of prestigious competitions around Dublin. I won the Chef of the Year competition in Dublin that was sponsored by the flake meal association – Odlums. The final was in the *Mirabeau*, and I said to Sean, messing, 'where is the can opener? I want to open up a few cans of beans'. I was only pulling his leg, but Sean, because there were other people around, said 'we don't have a can opener in the *Mirabeau*', but later on I had a bit of *craic* with him. I won that competition, a prize of £500, and the following year there was one sponsored by Irish Mist and I beat a John Clancy, Pat Zaidan etc. and in the paper there was a headline 'Veteran chef wins major competition' (laugh). Another £500, so the next one came, and I applied, and I got a letter back saying 'Dear Sir, we regret to inform you...' they didn't want me in it, which was fair enough and a compliment in itself. But I know Sean for donkeys' years and as the man says, he's a character. I met himself and Audrey a while ago and he is still as flamboyant as ever.
- 180.**MM:** Was the development of Oriental restaurants the big change you saw in your time in the college?
- 181.**JB:** When it happened first, there was a few Chinese restaurants with the one wallpaper, it must have been a job lot, this red wallpaper. I remember getting two chicken currys and a bottle of wine and you would have change out of £20 and all of a sudden even that became a bit refined, it went way up market. I remember the first Oriental shop in Dublin, I used to go up once a week to get my stuff every Tuesday for my Oriental demonstration, carry two plastic bags down Grafton Street which would cut the hands off you. Helen would be counting the beansprouts then, today she is a multi-millionaire, are you with me? I met her one day; they were shopping for a top of the range Mercedes down in Deansgrange. I had the same old rusty car (laugh). But it is amazing, now they have this Emporium.
- 182.**MM:** When did you start the advanced courses? Was it when Jimmy Kilbride retired?
- 183.**JB:** Yes, Jimmy retired and I did the 706/3 for two years and the man that we had as our examiner was Harry Cracknell, and he was eighty years of age and I couldn't keep up with him. He was opening up the noisettes of lamb looking for scraps. You would want to see this man, you would want to see his marking sheet – noisettes 10/10 and then he started deducting marks, trimming bad, minus one mark – I was very impressed with him. Eamon O'Reilly was in that class, James Carberry was in that class, three guys who are lecturers in Ireland were in that class – Frank is in Galway, and then another one is in Waterford. People may laugh at the 706/3 but you can actually look at all these people who did it, they all did very well. I think the 706/3 had something special about it.
- 184.**Then they decided, I think the Maastricht Agreement had something to do with it, that every country would recognise other countries qualifications. Then CERT said 'let's do away with this two year thing and put on twelve week modules, then trimmed it down to ten weeks etc. I wrote the Ethnic module. It was, believe it or not, the most popular of them all, sure you did it yourself. It is a shame to see it die. I think that was the instigator of lowering the standards. Maggie Thatcher brought in the NVQ, which means you don't bother coming to school at all, just send in your book and we tick the boxes, you know.**

- 185.MM: That was proven to be a disaster, but it is interesting to note that Maastricht was the beginning of the change in standards of education. Another thing I'm interested in is the role of gender in kitchens. When did women start working as chefs in kitchens in Ireland?
- 186.JB: I'll tell you, there were women eyeing the spuds in the Metropole, but Mary Murphy in the Royal Hibernian Hotel was ahead of her time, she was the larder chef and as good a larder chef as you would meet anywhere. What? A woman chef in the kitchen? It was unheard of, it was only kind of latter years, in my lifestyle in the mid 80s with the opening of the Regional Technical Colleges (RTCs) that they started coming in.
- 187.MM: There were no girls in Rockwell?
- 188.JB: No, all boys, but I remember when I was in Ashford there was a girl on the sweets and she was excellent. There was another girl, I started her off in the kitchen and she did breakfasts, I trained her into breakfasts and she was great, so I trained her as a cook and she did veg. Her father was the gardener and he was so grateful it was nearly embarrassing, she was a grand girl. I think kitchens were so rough pre that, you weren't going to get them. A lot of fellows barely survived, you know (laugh).
- 189.MM: Talking about that, there was a lot of alcoholism in the trade, a lot of fellows with great talent died young from drink? You probably saw a lot of that?
- 190.JB: Absolutely, it was unbelievable; I remember trying to flame that lobster with a brandy bottle on some sauce corner and it was only cold tea that had been replaced in the bottle. It was a big, big problem. You see the anti-social hours, a lot of the people went to the pub for the afternoon. We played football and went to the pictures, but it would be terribly easy to go over and have four or five pints, it would be sad but you know.
- 191.MM: But there was the whole sweat pint system in the Intercontinental when you were there, wasn't there?
- 192.JB: We got a beer ration every night, a couple of bottles of ale or smithwicks or whatever, but poor old Günter that we spoke about earlier, he went to open a hotel in Africa somewhere and died and is buried in Africa. God love him, he was one of natures' gentlemen, but circumstances and whatever he saw during the war and that, you know.
- 193.MM: Did you know many of the other foreign chefs that worked here? You had Willy Widmer in Jury's, Dame Street, and then Michel Treyvaud, and Josef Frei was up in Killakee House?
- 194.JB: I knew them all very well, Willy opened up in Drogheda in the Boyne Valley Hotel.
- 195.MM: How about the Irish chefs who did well for themselves, Michael Clifford, do you know where else Michael worked, I know he was in Whites on the Green, but do you know did he train anywhere foreign?
- 196.JB: Michael's training was London, the places I don't know. When Michael came back to open Whites on the Green, he sent me an invitation to have dinner there. Now this was one of my first experiences of *nouvelle cuisine*. We had chicken breast that was fanned out on a plate with stuffed cherry tomato and a mange tout, and I thought everything was lovely but everything was cold (laugh), because by the time somebody is finished fiddling around with it for twenty minutes, you know. Now I would certainly be impressed with Michael, he was a lovely cook and that, but I had my doubts about the *nouvelle cuisine*. Compare that to a *Coq au Vin*, they wouldn't even equate.
- 197.MM: Of that movement, who impressed you? I remember you being impressed by Anton Mossiman, the Swiss chef in the Dorchester?

198.**JB:** Yes, Anton Mossiman was the first to impress me, Rory (Ó Morachain) was his *sous chef* for years, and I used to get phone calls from Rory 'Jim, I'm here in Anton's office, Irish *hors d'oeuvres*?' I'd say 'smoked trout and smoked salmon, and do them up nicely...' So Anton Mossiman came to the college and he was down giving a lecture down in the lecture theatre, and I was giving a night class up in Kitchen 18, when one of the attendants came up saying the Mr. Mossiman wanted to talk to me. I thought it was just another wind-up, Aidan Martin again, so ignored it. Next thing I get Joe Hegarty on the phone saying that Mossiman could not wait all night for me, he had a plane to catch. Fame at last says I (laugh), but he shook my hand and said 'Rory sends his regards'. Rory was his right hand man for eight years, I'd say he was there from dawn to dusk for years, probably caused him his marriage. He was a lovely man, Mossiman would have been one of the first to really impress me, he used black plates with red pepper sauces, tournedos seared medium rare, put in a bowl and then covered with consommé. He had a fish consommé with little fish swimming around in it; there were little crabs and that, so I was wondering how was that done? I went to Hotelympia the next year and bought the cutters, I thought it was the greatest thing since fried bread, it was too of its time, but he was delivering the goods as well. He was one of the first components of that style.

199.**MM:** I think I recall you being impressed also by Shaun Hill?

200.**JB:** I had the most fantastic experience with Shaun Hill. He came to Dublin for a workshop in CERT Amiens Street. He was in Gildeigh Park, and he showed me his menu. His sauces were stock reductions and he used the foamer to lighten them up. Pat Zaidan worked with him there, when this workshop was over I was to bring him down to meet Michael Martin in the Clarence at 8pm. We started off at 4pm in a pub in the North Strand drinking pints of Guinness, he was a madman, he couldn't pass a pub. Michael Martin was doing his nut, we arrived late. We went into the bar and Michael was saying 'I've got dinner for a big crowd', 'shut up, get over here you little bollix, Barman, a bottle of Dom Perignon and three pints of Guinness'. I swear to Jaysus, it was one of the best nights I ever had, a lovely guy, a madman, a total madman, the guy is a genius. He interprets ancient Greek manuscripts when he is not busy, you know, a pure academic turned cook, which is amazing, but a lovely guy. I was really impressed with him, you know. Michael (Martin) had worked in La Stampa when he was in college and La Stampa was in its infancy then.

201.**MM:** So Michael was in La Stampa before going to London and then he would have returned there as head chef before opening up the Clarence. That makes sense.

202.**JB:** The missing pieces of the jigsaw! I hope that has been of some use to you.

203.**MM:** It's been great, thank you so much for your time.

End of Interview